

## **VIOLENCE IN MANIPUR, NORTH-EAST INDIA**

### **Investigative Report to the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance**

*Update to the Council of Experts – 14 September 2023*

*(Following original report of 21.6.23)*

On 21 June 2023, a report on the violence in Manipur, north-east India, was circulated to the IRFBA Plenary and wider Council of Experts as compiled by a few members of the Council of Experts. This report was released two days after a viral video of two Kuki women was released on the internet graphically showing them being assaulted. The report sought to document the violence that had broken out seven weeks earlier, as testified by eyewitnesses from on the ground. The report included first-hand accounts from members of the Meitei and Kuki communities, as well as journalists and political leaders, that had been presented live to the Council of Experts via a webinar on 1 June 2023. The report acknowledged that, while there were undeniably several underlying factors that had led to the violence that had erupted between 3 – 6 May 2023 that had led to the loss of over 100 lives, at least 228 churches being destroyed, 300 people being injured, in excess of 26,000 persons being displaced, and over 50,000 persons being forced to relocate, there was a strong reason to believe that the violence could in part be characterised as being religiously motivated.

Three months later, the situation in Manipur continues to be of great concern and the international institutions have started to raise alarm bells and call upon the Indian government to immediately intervene. On 12 July 2023, the European Parliament adopted an [urgency resolution](#) to call on the Indian government to “take urgent steps to restore calm” in the unfolding tribal and religious crisis, as well as “tackle the impunity enjoyed by the mobs perpetrating the violence and respond to stem the violence in line with their international human rights obligations”. On 4 September 2023, the Special Procedures of the [United Nations Human Rights Council](#) declared that the violence had “reached a breaking point” and appealed to the government of India to address the ethnic, tribal and religious crisis.

Since the release of the Manipur report that was circulated dated 21<sup>st</sup> June, the situation appears to be unresolved, with the latest numbers of victims having risen to at least 163 deaths, 60,000 displaced, 292 villages burned, 4,500 houses burned down, and 357 churches destroyed. Several factors continue to be concerning.

Firstly, the State government has not responded to calls to reinstate internet access to the region and permit independent journalists to enter the affected areas. The Editors’ Guild of India reported that there have been significant failures in journalism and reporting, including by the encouragement of a Meitei media narrative that misses key details of the conflict and focuses on partisan views. International journalism has also largely been lacking in documenting the pertinent facts and in citing claims that the violence has impacted Hindu communities in addition to Christian communities. While the attacks on Christian places of worship can be corroborated by multiple sources, the references by the BBC to 17 ‘destroyed’ temples cannot be verified. As recommended by an Amnesty International report of 12 July 2023, “victims of violence have a right to truth, accountability, and justice. Police excesses and reports of police bias need to be immediately, independently, and impartially investigated”.

Secondly, the court processes have been inadequate to provide swift and comprehensive relief. As of 1 August 2023, the State government informed the Supreme Court of India that 6,523 First Incident Reports had been registered. In recent petitions filed before the Supreme Court by Kuki and Meitei groups, the deliberate attack on churches has been alleged to be due to the factor of the churches representing important places to the Christian communities. Another writ petition before the Supreme Court (No. 540/2023) seeks the Apex court's intervention in the attacks against the Kuki community about two specific armed communal organisations – the Arambai Tenggol and the Meitei Leepun. While the State has reported that it has filed just over 5000 cases of arson, compensation has only been announced for the registered deaths.

Thirdly, the disproportionate impact of the violence on Christian communities has yet to be acknowledged by the international community. While the 21 June report assessed that there was an urgent need for an independent panel of religious freedom experts to enter the Manipur region to comment on the seemingly targeted nature of the attacks upon the predominantly Christian Kuki community and the Christian community within the Meitei group, there have been very few attempts internationally to name freedom of religion or belief as one of the core drivers and this underlying cause of the violence remains unreported.

It is evident that there is still an urgent need for: an independent assessment of the violations of freedom of religion or belief in Manipur; the State government to reinstate the internet and journalist access; full and effective relief to be provided to victims of violence and arson; and full access for humanitarian workers to provide support to people who remain displaced. The Indian central government must also intervene and provide comment on how to de-escalate any ongoing or future conflict.